

SOCIAL SECURITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Social Security Advisory Committee: Business Plan 2021-22

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Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present the Social Security Advisory Committee's (SSAC's) business plan which sets out our strategic objectives for the year ahead, and how we will measure our success against them. This business plan makes clear the Committee's commitment to deliver against our statutory obligations and provide advice on vital social security matters that is relevant, well-informed and supported by a clear evidence base. In doing so, we will:

- work constructively and collaboratively with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP);
- engage effectively with our stakeholders throughout the UK;
- ensure through visits and consultations that our advice reflects current experience and practice from the front-line; and
- undertake our work in an efficient, cost-conscious and transparent manner.

The Committee's effective scrutiny of regulations will continue to be our main priority and this activity will take precedence over our other work. The Committee is keen to explore how we can strengthen the support we provide to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue (HMRC) and Customs by adding value to the process further 'upstream', so that the regulations presented to us for statutory scrutiny have already benefitted to some degree from our input and are in the best possible shape.

We will also explore what more we can do to support officials as they prepare for the scrutiny process. For example, I and my Committee colleagues have recently hosted successful workshops for policy staff to provide insight to the process and advice on how to prepare for it. We have also strengthened our written guidance for staff who will be presenting regulations to the Committee to ensure that it is as clear, informative and transparent as possible.

We would like DWP and HMRC to regard us as a resource that can add value to the regulations process, rather than a hurdle to be overcome.

Where resources permit, we will undertake a small number of research projects, providing impartial, well-informed and constructive advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on issues relating to social security benefits and welfare reform. The issues that we examine, and on which we provide advice to Ministers, will reflect the strength of expertise and experience on the Committee and also

our trusted relationship with the Department thereby taking advantage of our unique ability to help in areas where others are less equipped to do so. One key learning we will be taking forward from our experience of the Coronavirus pandemic is to ensure that we have the capacity, capability and agility to be responsive to ensure we can provide short, constructive, timely advice to Ministers on emerging issues.

In taking forward our strategic objectives, we will seek to build on three areas of learning emerging from the past year. For example:

- our report [How DWP involves disabled people when developing or evaluating programmes that affect them](#) makes a number of recommendations setting out where we consider the Department can go further in embedding best practice across its organisation. But in doing so, we come to the realisation that there are lessons from this exercise that we could – and should – take on board ourselves. Whether that be making our consultation exercises and workshops are more accessible, or ensuring that more of our communications are available in Easy Read. We are committed to doing better and delivering some positive change.
- the reliance on video-conferences during periods of lockdown and lockdown restrictions has meant that we have been able to ensure that our stakeholder engagement has been more inclusive and diverse than in previous years. This has been a very positive development and, while we will continue to have face to face engagement from time to time, we are very keen to embed the new ‘virtual’ engagement into our working arrangements.
- Finally, we will continue to keep under review the recommendations of the [Tailored Review of SSAC](#) to ensure that opportunities for improvement are taken on board.

I look forward to working with my Committee colleagues and our secretariat in delivering the objectives set out in this document.

Dr Stephen Brien
Chair

About Us

Our Remit

Established in 1980, the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) is an independent statutory body that provides advice on social security and related matters.

The Committee has, by statute, a vital role in the scrutiny of detailed and complex draft social security regulations and in the provision of impartial, well-informed and constructive advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. We also have an important role in identifying and providing advice on wider related issues through our independent research programme.

Statutory responsibilities of SSAC

1. To perform a mandatory scrutiny of most of the proposed regulations that underpin the social security system on behalf of the Secretary of State, for the benefit of both the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Parliament;
2. To provide advice and assistance to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether in response to a specific request or on our own initiative.

Advice offered formally by the Committee in relation to proposals for secondary legislation must be published by the Secretary of State, along with the Government's response to our conclusions and recommendations. The response must include a statement showing the extent to which the Secretary of State has given effect to the Committee's recommendations and, if any are rejected, the reason(s) why. The Secretary of State's statement must be laid before Parliament, alongside the Committee's report and the relevant regulations.

There is no obligation upon the Secretary of State to respond to other forms of advice from the Committee, or to act on any of the advice we offer.

We perform a similar role for the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland. We also have a non-statutory role offering advice to Treasury

Ministers and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on tax credits, National Insurance, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance.

The statutory scrutiny of secondary legislation is the Committee's priority, and takes precedence over other activity undertaken by the Committee. But where resources permit, and as part of our general advisory functions, we:

- ✓ undertake our own detailed studies as part of our independent work programme;
- ✓ informally scrutinise regulations that are exempt from our statutory scrutiny;
- ✓ respond to public consultation exercises conducted by Government and others where we believe that we can add value;
- ✓ respond to specific requests for advice from ministers and officials;
- ✓ provide comment on some of the key pieces of draft guidance and communications produced by the DWP and/or HMRC.

Our Resources

The Committee is required by statute to have been 10 and 13 members, plus a Chairman. We are supported by a small secretariat of four. Our budget allocation for 2021-22 is £350,000, and this covers all of our operational costs, including members' fees and staff costs.

Committee Membership

Committee Chair: Dr Stephen Brien

Bruce Calderwood¹

Mathew Doyle²

Carl Emmerson³

Kayley Hignell

Phil Jones⁴

Chris Goulden

Professor Gráinne McKeever⁵

Seyi Obakin OBE⁶

Charlotte Pickles

Liz Sayce OBE^{3, 7}

¹ Chair of SSAC's Independent Work Programme sub-committee

² Represents the interest of workers

³ Vice Chair

⁴ Represents the interests of Wales and business, and is the Chair of SSAC's Communications and Stakeholder Engagement sub-committee

⁵ Chair of SSAC's Postal Regulations sub-committee, and represents the interests of Northern Ireland

⁶ Represents the interests of BAME communities

⁷ Chair and represents the interests of disabled and chronically ill people

Our Priorities

Our priorities for 2021-22 are as follows:

- **Priority #1: Scrutiny of draft regulations:** we will undertake impartial, effective and timely scrutiny of draft regulations relating to social security benefits. The Committee's scrutiny of secondary legislation takes priority over its other work.
- **Priority #2: Research projects:** Where resources permit, the Committee will undertake a small number of research projects, providing impartial, well-informed and constructive advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on issues relating to social security and welfare reform.
- **Priority #3: Capacity / capability to be responsive:** The Committee will ensure it is sufficiently agile to ensure it can provide short, constructive, timely responses and advice on emerging issues.

All of the activities undertaken during 2021-22 will be consistent with the Committee's Results Framework.

Scrutiny of draft regulations

The Committee will explore how it can effectively add value to the regulations process further upstream, so that the proposals presented to us for statutory scrutiny have already benefitted to some degree from our input and are in the best possible shape for Parliament. The Committee's ambition is to be regarded as a trusted resource that can add value to the process, rather than a hurdle to be overcome at the point of scrutiny.

To ensure we can deliver this priority effectively, we will keep under review our ability to undertake a high quality and forensic scrutiny of draft secondary legislation, taking steps to further strengthen our technical understanding of the benefit system as necessary.

We will also support officials by providing insight to the scrutiny process and advice on how to prepare for it. We have also strengthened our written guidance for staff who will be presenting regulations to the Committee to ensure that it is as clear, informative and transparent as possible, for example by emphasising the importance of providing a discrete articulation of the

relevant policy intent which will enable the Committee to be more focused in its deliberations and discussions with officials.

Research Projects

The issues that we examine, and on which we provide advice to Ministers, will reflect the strength of expertise and experience on the Committee as well as our trusted relationship with the Department. So taking advantage of our unique ability to help in areas where other organisations are less equipped to do so.

The research we carry out as part our independent work programme is designed to:

- ✓ provide an evidence base for our work, improving members' ability to scrutinise regulations and provide credible independent advice to ministers;
- ✓ add value to the debate on a topic that is of current interest to government or a broad range of our stakeholders;
- ✓ stimulate debate or discussion of a specific topic; and/or
- ✓ introduce new thinking on data analysis.

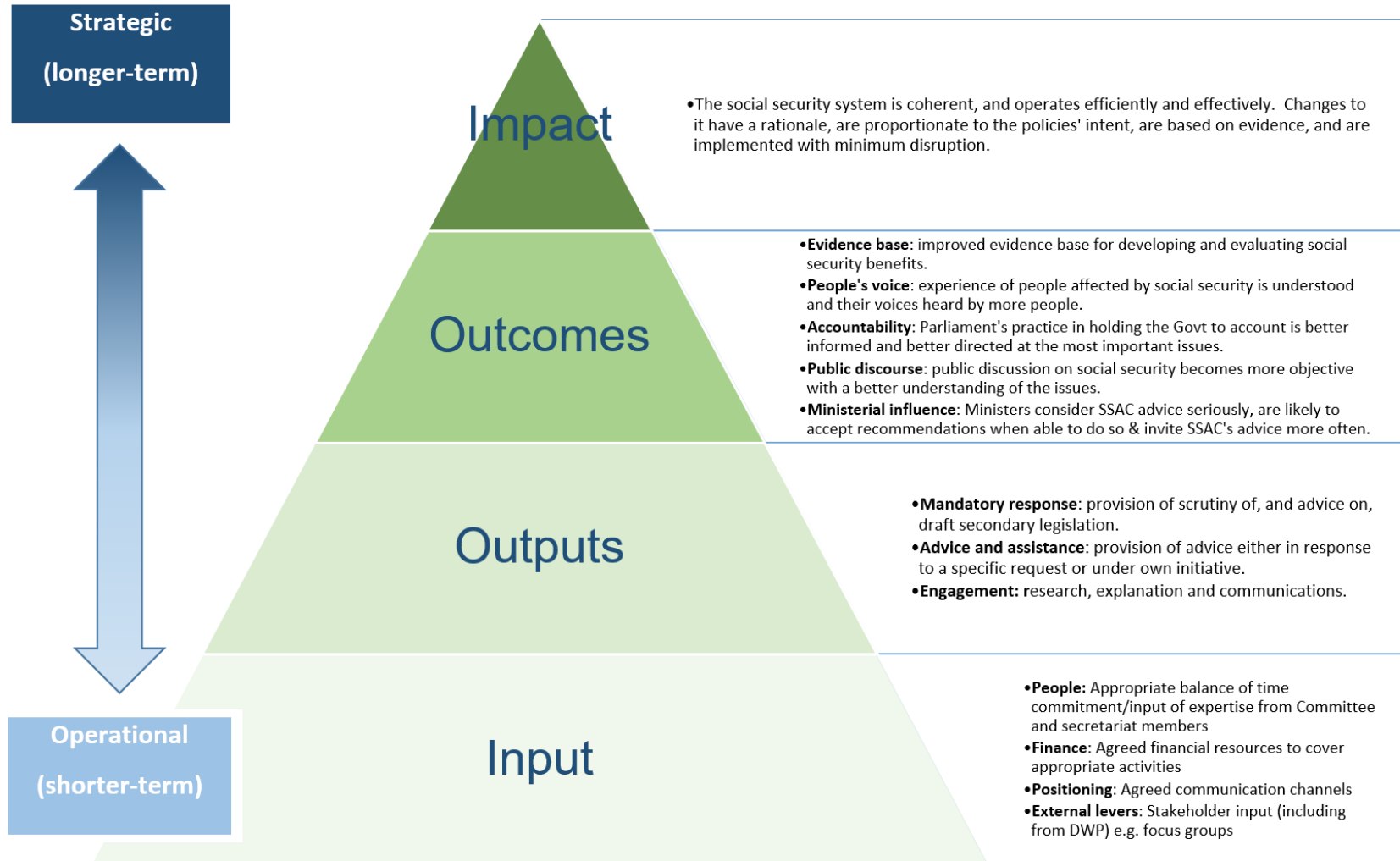
While there must be a clear line drawn in terms of SSAC's independence and impartiality, we are keen that the advice we provide is timely and useful and delivers outcomes consistent with our Results Framework. With this in mind, we will discuss our plans with the Department as we finalise the scope for each project to ensure that our advice is well-targeted, constructive and can have maximum impact.

Tailored Review of SSAC

The findings of the [Tailored Review of SSAC](#), published on 24 February 2021, will be kept under review as we take forward our priorities.

Our Results Framework

INDEPENDENT – INFORMED – INSIGHTFUL – INFLUENTIAL



Our objectives

There are a number of specific activities on which we intend to focus during 2021-22 in order to be effective in delivering our priorities. In particular, we aim to:

Provision of advice

- continue to work constructively and effectively with DWP to ensure that our respective roles in the delivery of high quality draft regulations are delivered well and in a timely manner;
- continue our rolling annual programme of appropriate and timely research projects for the Committee's independent work programme, with a minimum of two projects to be completed within 2021-22;
- provide effective broader support to the Secretary of State through proactive and timely advice on emerging priority areas;
- embed our results framework, including reviewing our past recommendations on a regular basis for continued relevance and to ensure that the impact of our advice is understood;

Ensuring our work is evidence based

- develop more active and targeted stakeholder engagement to ensure that our advice to Ministers is well-informed, takes account of a wide range of perspectives and provides constructive support to the policy-making process. We will:
 - be inclusive of stakeholders in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to ensure that their voice is heard in the advice we provide to Ministers and that the impact of greater devolution - including city devolution and localisation - of social security provision is understood;
 - engage with diverse stakeholders including claimants, advice agencies, voluntary organisations, academics and other experts; taking steps to ensure effective engagement with diverse communities including disabled people and people from black and minority ethnic communities;

- ensure that we develop an understanding of the operational issues that are likely to flow from new policy initiatives, and are able to review the progress of the implementation of Universal Credit, through a programme of visits to DWP sites and other stakeholders;

Ways of working

- further strengthen our links, both at ministerial and official level, with:
 - the Department for Work and Pensions, further developing our trusted relationship to maximise our ability to provide high quality, well-informed and timely advice on a range of social security matters;
 - the Department for Communities to ensure the effective delivery of our statutory duties in Northern Ireland; and
 - HMRC and HM Treasury under our [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to ensure that due account is taken of their role in relation to benefit matters, particularly in the transition of tax credits to Universal Credit;
- reflect on the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had on the Committee's ways of working and consider what lessons can be learned, or opportunities seized. For example, we have identified that our greater reliance on Microsoft Teams for engagement with stakeholders has resulted in a more inclusive approach enabling us to reach out to stakeholders who were unable to travel to our face to face events.
- make the best use of our people and financial resources, in a cost conscious manner and reflecting our commitment to diversity and inclusion. We will continue to benchmark ourselves against other organisations of a similar size and/or remit, and identifying areas of best practice.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

All of our work - including our scrutiny of draft regulations, our research projects, our recruitment exercises and our engagement of stakeholders - will reflect equality, diversity and inclusion. We recently examined how DWP

involves disabled people when developing or evaluating programmes that affect them, and our report⁸ made a number of recommendations setting out where we considered the Department could go further and embed best practice across its organisation. But in doing so, we realised that there are lessons from this exercise that we could – and should – take on board ourselves, for example making our consultation exercises and workshops more accessible to all. We are committed to doing better.

Measuring our success

We will report on the degree to which we have achieved these objectives in our Annual Report. Our performance will be informed by:

- Our Results Framework;
- Feedback from the Department and our other stakeholders on the usefulness of our work (both scrutiny of regulations and our independent work programme) and advice to Ministers; and an
- In-year effectiveness review of the Committee.

Success criteria will consider the degree to which we have delivered:

- Rigorous scrutiny of draft regulations within agreed deadlines.
- Provision of pertinent, well informed and influential advice to Ministers, informed by our stakeholders' experience, expertise and other evidence.
- Strong engagement and collaboration with the DWP, HM Revenue and Customs, Department for Communities Northern Ireland and other appropriate Government and devolved bodies.
- Transparency about the Committee's operation and expenditure, including publication of our minutes and reports, the fees and expenses for each Committee member, and the costs of our secretariat.

⁸ SSAC Occasional Paper No. 25: [How DWP involves disabled people when developing or evaluating programmes that affect them](#)

Our operating principles

Whilst undertaking its activities the Committee will remain conscious of its responsibilities for:

- prudent management
- cost conscious management of its budget (£350,000)⁹
- confidentiality where appropriate
- transparency
- quality governance in accordance with the [DWP/SSAC Framework Agreement](#) and the [Partnerships between departments and arm's length bodies code of good practice](#)
- regular assessment of risks, and ensuring plans are in place for managing them.

⁹ £225,000 of which are allocated to staff costs.

Members of the Committee

Dr Stephen Brien (Chair)

Dr Stephen Brien was appointed as Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee in September 2020.

Stephen is Director of Policy at the Legatum Institute. In addition to overseeing all the Institute's policy programmes, his research focuses on the socio-economic drivers of prosperity around the world. Stephen is also passionate about finding solutions to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the most vulnerable in the UK. From 2015-17, Stephen was an advisor to governments in both the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa. He has been a Director at Social Finance; and he also advised the UK Department for Work and Pensions from 2010 to 2013. Prior to joining DWP, Stephen spent 15 years at Oliver Wyman, where he was a Partner, and served a term as the head of its London Office. He is the author of Dynamic Benefits (the blueprint for Universal Credit) and Outcome-based Government.

Bruce Calderwood

Bruce Calderwood is a trustee of the Avenues Group, a charity specialising in supporting people with complex needs. He was for many years a senior official in DWP in a wide range of roles. He ended his civil service career as the director in the Department of Health responsible for policy on mental health, disability and equality. In this role he led the team which created the 2010 to 2015 coalition government's mental health strategy and its review of services for learning disabled people following the Winterbourne View scandal. He is a specialist adviser on inspections of mental health trusts for the Care Quality Commission.

Bruce joined the Committee in 2016.

Matthew Doyle

Matthew Doyle holds a number of non-executive roles across commercial, not for profit and charitable sectors which have provided him with knowledge and experience on how the social security system is accessed by individuals and families. He also consults on ESG and corporate governance to asset owners.

His areas of interest include: financial inclusion; digital access; social care & housing; and mental health & wellbeing.

Previously he had an executive career in financial services across corporate finance, corporate recovery, asset management and pensions developing analytical and relationship skills.

Matthew joined the Committee in 2021.

Carl Emmerson

Carl is Deputy Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS). He is an editor of the annual IFS Green Budget, and his research includes analysis of the UK public finances and the design of the tax and benefit system, in particular relating to state and private pensions. He has previously served as a specialist adviser to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee.

Carl was appointed to the Committee in 2016.

Chris Goulden

Chris is Director of Impact & Evidence for Youth Futures Foundation. Prior to that, for 17 years, he worked in and then led the research function at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. He is a former social researcher at the Home Office and Cabinet Office. Chris has also been a cancer researcher in the NHS, a member of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills Policy Expert Group and a member of the Social Research Association Board. He has a Master's degree in social research methods from South Bank University.

Chris joined the Committee in 2012.

Kayley Hignell

Kayley is the Head of Policy for Families, Welfare and Work at Citizens Advice. Prior to joining the national Citizens Advice team Kayley was a frontline adviser at Leeds Citizens Advice where she gave advice on all issues including benefits, debt and housing. She has continued to volunteer as an adviser alongside her policy roles. Kayley has also spent time on secondment to DWP where she worked to bring frontline experience into the early design of Universal Credit.

Kayley joined the Committee in 2020.

Philip Jones

Phil was appointed as Prince's Trust Cymru Director in June 2016. Previously, Phil was the Wales Area Manager for The Royal British Legion during the time of the charity's transformation. Previously, he had served in the Armed Forces for over 25 years as an officer in The Royal Welsh. His roles included overseeing the delivery of combat and leadership training, media and strategic communications, and planning and delivering intelligence training both in the UK and abroad. Phil's family hail from Lampeter and Llandullas. He was born in Bicester, Oxfordshire and attended Lord Williams's School, Thame, before being commissioned into the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1986.

Phil joined the Committee in 2018.

Prof Gráinne McKeever

Gráinne McKeever is a Professor of Law and Social Justice at Ulster University and has published widely in the areas of social security law and access to justice. She is the assistant editor of the Journal of Social Security Law and currently teaches social security law and policy to undergraduate and postgraduate law students. Gráinne is the director of Ulster University's Law Clinic, through which postgraduate law students provide social security advocacy for members of the public. Gráinne is also a former executive director and Chair of the Law Centre, Northern Ireland, a not-for-profit specialist advice organisation.

Gráinne joined the Committee in 2014.

Seyi Obakin OBE

Seyi Obakin OBE is the Chief Executive of Centrepoin, a leading national charity working with young people who have experienced homelessness. He is a chartered accountant and has worked in a wide range of social housing provision. He has also been involved in research and inquiries into family life and the support families need, lifelong literacy and youth enterprise. He is currently serving as a Commissioner of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

Seyi joined the Committee in 2014.

Charlotte Pickles

Charlotte (Charlie) Pickles is Director at Reform. She was previously Reform's Deputy Director and Head of Research. Prior to returning to Reform, Charlie was Managing Editor at UnHerd.com, the comment and current affairs site.

Charlie has worked in a variety of roles covering:

- working age welfare and pension reform
- criminal justice
- poverty and social exclusion
- service delivery

During the coalition government she was Expert Adviser to Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Before that she was Policy Director at the Centre for Social Justice. Charlie has also spent time working as a management consultant in the public sector practice of a global consultancy firm. Charlie is also a member of the NHS Assembly.

Charlie was appointed to the Committee in 2016.

Liz Sayce

She was the Chief Executive of Disability Rights UK until 31 May 2017, leading work to achieve equal participation for all, through programmes on independent living, career opportunities and shifts in cultural attitudes and behaviour. With a background in mental health and disability policy, previous roles include:

- Director of Policy and Communications at the Disability Rights Commission
- Policy Director of Mind

Liz led an [independent review into disability employment programmes](#) for government in 2011 and has published widely on mental health, disability and social participation. Liz is also:

- a member of the Disability Advisory Committee of the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- a Trustee of Action on Disability and Development

She chaired a Commission on Equality in Mental Health, convened by the Centre for Mental Health, from 2019-21.

Liz was appointed to the Committee in 2016.

SOCIAL SECURITY

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